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ABSTRACT

This report describes different methods used by the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and Texas Tech University to provide training to rural teachers in serving students with visual impairments. Distance education is well-suited to the problem of rural personnel preparation. UAB uses videotaped lessons in conjunction with on-campus classes, while Texas Tech uses an outreach training model. Both programs provide education through education service regions. Eighteen quarter hours of credit constitute the specialized training in serving students with visual impairments in Alabama while 21 semester hours are required in Texas. In addition, Texas Tech has an orientation-and-mobility program that includes some of the vision-sequence courses plus four advanced orientation-and-mobility courses and an additional practicum and internship. The UAB program supplements a traditional campus-based class by adding "expert" information via video. Videotaped cassettes are mailed to students along with study guides containing assignments, an evaluation component, and a listing of local resources. The Texas Tech outreach program involves the instructor traveling with materials to a rural region, and holding classes. Financial support for the coursework and travel is provided through a federal grant and state funds for the visually impaired. The report contains numerous figures describing training needs, course requirements, development of the programs, and numbers of students trained. (KS)

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Preparing Personnel to Serve Students with Visual Handicaps in Rural Areas: Two Preservice Alternatives

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Running head: Rural preservice alternatives

RC 018517

Preparing Personnel to Serve Students with Visual Handicaps in Rural Areas: Two Preservice Alternatives

There is a critical national shortage of teachers prepared to work with the blind and visually impaired learner (Bina, 1987). As of 1987, 45 states offered vision-specific teacher certifications, although the requirements vary greatly (Huebner & Strumwasser, 1987).

> The certified teacher of the visually handicapped, in addition to all of the skills and knowledge implied by having a regular teaching certificate, understands the ramifications of a visual impairment and can recommend or make adaptations intended to reduce its impact. This educator can teach and produce braille, is a specialist in visual development, and can assess the need for and provide instruction in the use of sophisticated computer technology.Orientation and mobility instructors are specialists trained to teach visually handicapped students how to become oriented to their home, school, and community and how to travel in those environments in a safe, efficient, and graceful manner. The use of the cane, special low vision aids, and/or electronic equipment for travel purposes may be an essential part of orientation and mobility instruction. (TEA, 1989, pV-162)

Low enrollment of future teachers and high university costs have led to the demise of many programs leaving less than 30 teacher training programs in the United States. We are confronted with a shrinking professional population and an ever growing student population.

This situation is further aggravated by the rural character of many southern states. Alabama and Texas are considered rural since Alabama has seven persons per square mile, with nine

metropolitan areas, and Texas has 45 persons per square mile, with 25 metropolitan areas. Students with visual impairments are widely scattered over a large geographic area with the greatest number of children residing outside of urban centers. With many pupils unserved, the recruitment and retention of certified personnel becomes an educational problem in rural areas. As an example, the ratios of trained teachers of the visually impaired to the number of students who are visually impaired in selected southern states is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Insert Figure 1 here

The personnel preparation demands placed upon existing teacher training programs has intensified. Colleges and universities, therefore, must respond to the paucity of trained educators in creative and innovative ways. The National Rural Research Consortium recommends facilitating university offerings in rural areas as a strategy to retrain teachers (Helge, 1983). Studies suggest that local personnel who receive on the job training are those most likely to remain in rural areas (Bina, 1981).

Distance education can play a very important role in rural teacher preparation. As well as serving as a vehicle for delivery of services to visually impaired children, distance models appear to be especially well-suited to the problem of personnel preparation in rural states.

Distance education is distinguished from campus-based instruction by the separation of the pupil and professor, the utilization of media, and the provision for two-way dialogue. Like traditional programs, however, external programs are also under the control of an institution of higher education (Keegan, 1980). Distance education is advantageous to both the practicing professional as well as the university. Benefits of distance education to institutions, as identified by Best (1989), are cost effectiveness, access to students, and minimized staffing difficulties. Teachers are pleased that certification courses are locally available thus reducing travel and disruption of family and personal obligations. An additional advantage to those teachers already instructing visually impaired students without the requisite training is the opportunity to immediately translate theory into practice with their pupils. Furthermore, these individuals are knowledgeable about local community resources as well as the informal ecological systems operating in their community (Sowell,Correa,and Wardell, 1987). Helge (1983) stated that knowledge about rural relationships is vital to optimum service delivery. Many of these educators also have a commitment to remain in their communities thereby providing continuity of services.

For a variety of reasons, many visually impaired and blind children are often without direct services or are inappropriately placed and subsequently inadequately served (Bickford & Maron, 1988). The Vision Outreach Project (VOP) at UAB and the Outreach

Program at Texas Tech are committed to remedying this problem in Alabama and Texas and their surrounding states.

The primary mission of both programs is to provide a preservice model for training in visual impairments to persons in rural areas. Neither university has the advantage of existing distance education departments. This objective is accomplished by each university through two diverse strategies. The University of Alabama at Birmingham utilizes video taped lessons in conjunction with on-campus classes, while Texas Tech uses an outreach training model.

The distance model works effectively in Alabama and Texas since both states already have education service regions. With this regional concept as a guide, students are in close proximity to the equipment, services, and materials provided by regional offices or other local facilities. The regional centers serve as a repository for university supplied reference and research materials that are required for completion of study modules or outreach classes.

Students in both universities enroll in graduate degree programs or they add an endorsement in visual impairments to a graduate teaching certificate. Eighteen quarter hours of credit constitutes the specialized training in visual impairments in Alabama while twenty-one semester hours are required in Texas. At UAB, coursework in visual impairments is distributed across six classes and, at Texas Tech, coursework in visual impairments is distributed across seven classes. In addition, Texas Tech has an

orientation and mobility program which includes some of the vision sequence courses plus four advanced orientation and mobility courses and an additional practicum and internship. Part-time students have traditionally characterized the student population enrolled in the visually impaired certification and degree programs at UAB and Texas Tech. The majority of these individuals are already employed as teachers of the visually impaired. Therefore, the required internship hours are individualized for each person. Supervision is provided by a faculty member; and, when locally available, a certified vision specialist. The faculty supervisor will travel to the student's community for regularly scheduled observation. Course requirements for certification, including practicum and internship,at UAB and Texas Tech are listed in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 here

Implementation of the UAB program was through a university grant for production of a pilot video module. Strategies and costs of providing a distance model for teacher training were analyzed to quantify the necessity of such a model. This program supplements a traditional campus-based class by adding "expert" information via video. This format is also being utilized in an outreach project conducted by the University of South Carolina (Parsons, 1986). Figure 3 is included to describe the steps which are utilized in developing video modules, distance training

programs, and the method of distribution of books and modules.

Insert Figure 3 here

The course content and requirements are similar to traditional on-campus instruction. Video taped cassettes can be mailed to the students along with study guides containing assignments, an evaluation component, and a listing of local resources appropriate to the content of the video tape. For teachers completing the Master's degree requirements, weekend, off-campus and summer classes are readily available.

The Texas Tech program involves the transporting of the instructor and materials to a rural region, where classes are to be held. Recruitment of students is done by the local Education Service Centers (ESC) requesting the classes. Financial support for the coursework and travel involved is provided through a federal grant as well as state funds for the visually handicapped. Approval for course credit is obtained through the College of Continuing Education and Graduate School of the university. Once arrangements have been made by the local ESC, and approvals are given by the university, classes are scheduled. Students receive instruction from the same professors that teach on-campus courses and receive on-campus credit for the coursework. The process of the development of the Texas Tech outreach course is included in Figure 4.

Insert Figure 4 here

The UAB and Texas Tech models have and will increase the availability of certified teachers in regions of Alabama, Texas and the surrounding states where presently there are few trained personnel.

The UAB and Texas Tech programs can have an impact on the delivery of services to visually impaired and blind students in their rural regions. This is illustrated by the numbers of students trained in both programs as shown in Figure 5.

Insert Figure 5 here

These projects have the potential of meeting the training needs of rural teachers in an economical fashion. Professionals have access to coursework previously unavailable to them. Cost effectiveness, coupled with increased student enrollment, ensures the continuation of these programs The opportunity for replication by other institutions of higher education is also possible. With an increase in the number of qualified teachers and orientation and mobility specialists, visually impaired and blind students in local education agencies in rural areas will have the opportunity to receive quality services.

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Figure 1 The ratios of trained teachers of the visually impaired to the number of students who are visually impaired in selected southern states.

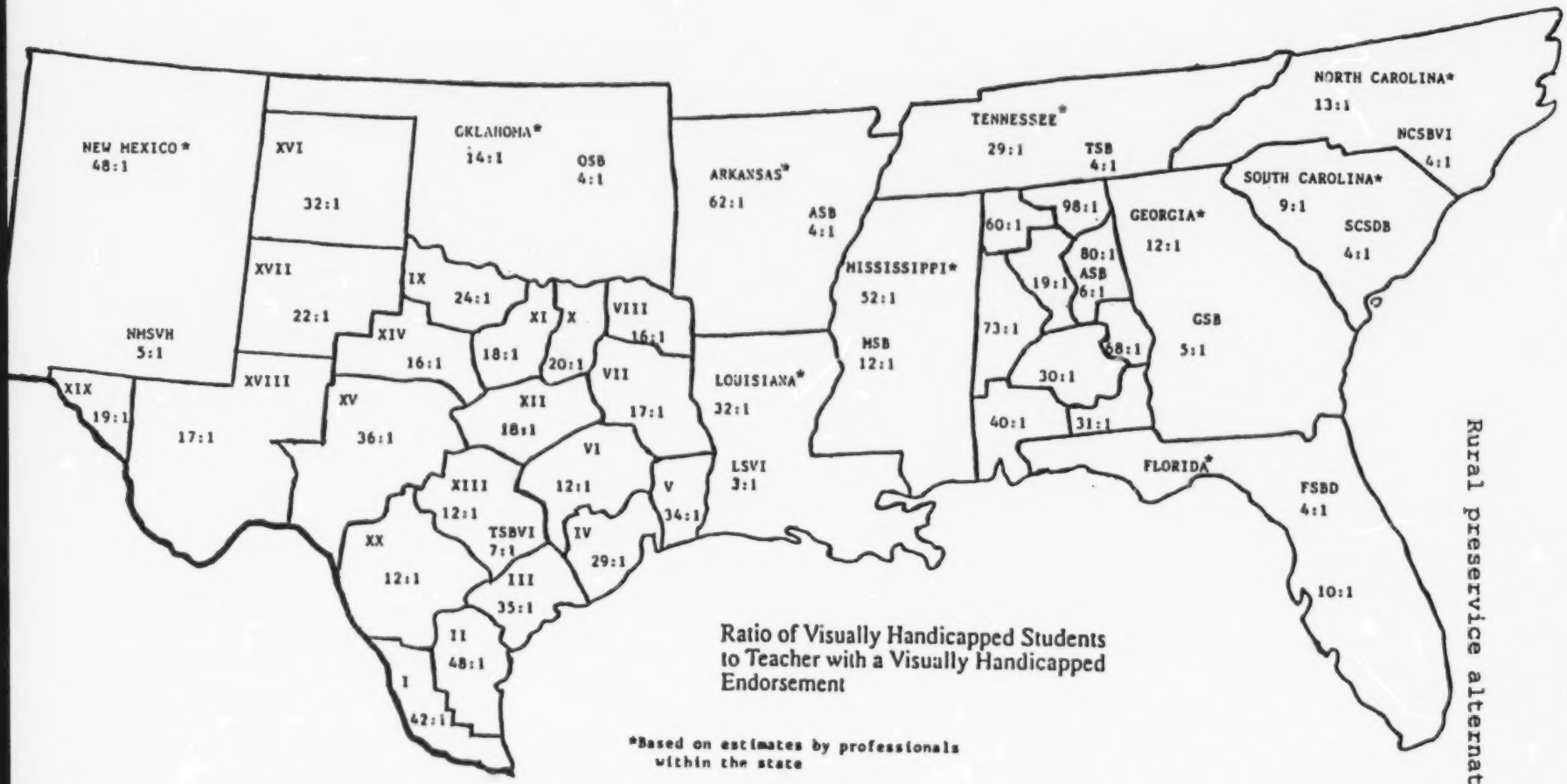
NEW MEXICO*
48:1
XVI
32:1
OKLAHOMA*
14:1
OSB
4:1
ARKANSAS*
62:1
ASB
4:1
TENNESSEE*
29:1
TSB
4:1
NORTH CAROLINA*
13:1
NCSBVI
4:1
SOUTH CAROLINA*
9:1
SCSDB
4:1
GEORGIA*
12:1
GSB
5:1
MISSISSIPPI*
52:1
MSB
12:1
LOUISIANA*
32:1
LSVI
3:1
FLORIDA*
FSBD
4:1
10:1
XVII
22:1
NMSVH
5:1
IX
24:1
XI
X
VIII
16:1
XIV
16:1
18:1
20:1
VII
17:1
XIX
19:1
XVIII
17:1
XV
36:1
XII
18:1
VI
12:1
XIII
12:1
TSBVI
7:1
V
34:1
XX
12:1
IV
29:1
III
35:1
II
48:1
I
42:1
60:1
98:1
80:1
ASB
6:1
19:1
73:1
68:1
30:1
40:1
31:1
Ratio of Visually Handicapped Students
to Teacher with a Visually Handicapped
Endorsement
*Based on estimates by professionals
within the state

Figure 2 Course requirements for certification, including practicum and internship, at UAB and Texas Tech.

Courses for Certification

Course title	Vision certification UAB	Vision certification TTU	Orientation & Mobility TTU
Nature & Needs/ Progs. & Services	X	X	X
Methods & Materials	X	X	X
Anatomy & Physiol/ Physical Aspects	X	X	X
Braille/Communication	X	X	
Basic O&M	X	X	X
Practicum	300 hrs	120 hrs	120 hrs + 350 internship
Consulting w/ Parents		X	
Int. O&M seminar			X
Int. O&M skills			X
Adv. O&M seminar			X
Adv. O&M skills			X
Total hours	18	21	30

Figure 3 The steps which are utilized in developing video modules, distance training programs, and the method of distribution of books and modules

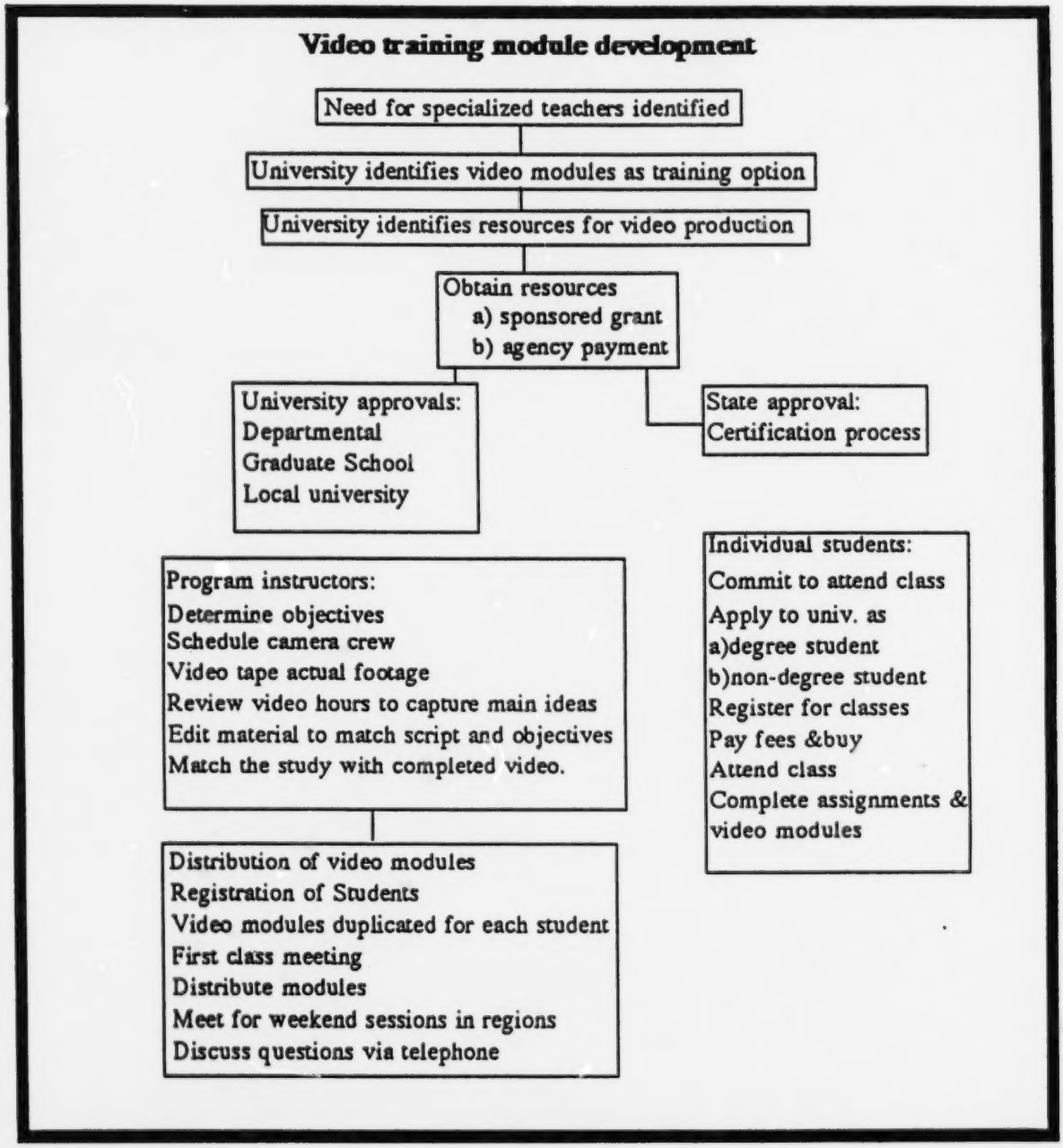
Video training module development
Need for specialized teachers identified
University identifies video modules as training option
University identifies resources for video production
Obtain resources
a) sponsored grant
b) agency payment
University approvals:
Departmental
Graduate School
Local university
State approval:
Certification process
Program instructors:
Determine objectives
Schedule camera crew
Video tape actual footage
Review video hours to capture main ideas
Edit material to match script and objectives
Match the study with completed video.
Individual students:
Commit to attend class
Apply to univ. as
a)degree student
b)non-degree student
Register for classes
Pay fees &buy
Attend class
Complete assignments &
video modules
Distribution of video modules
Registration of Students
Video modules duplicated for each student
First class meeting
Distribute modules
Meet for weekend sessions in regions
Discuss questions via telephone

Figure 4 The process of the development of the Texas Tech off-campus outreach courses is included in Figure 4.

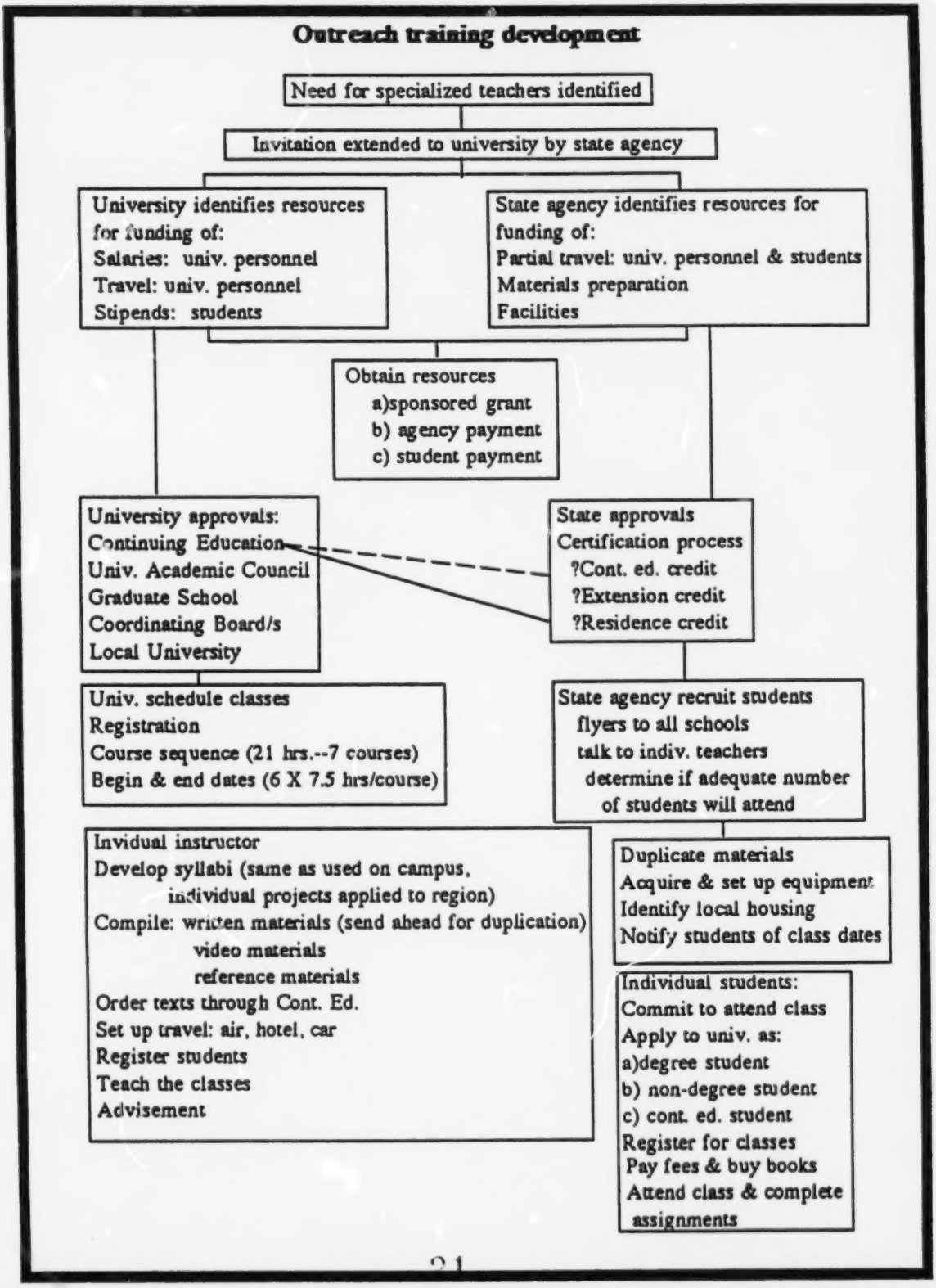
Outreach training development
Need for specialized teachers identified
Invitation extended to university by state agency
University identifies resources for funding of:
Salaries: univ. personnel
Travel: univ. personnel
Stipends: students
State agency identifies resources for funding of:
Partial travel: univ. personnel & students
Materials preparation
Facilities
Obtain resources
a)sponsored grant
b) agency payment
c) student payment
University approvals:
Continuing Education
Univ. Academic Council
Graduate School
Coordinating Board/s
Local University
State approvals
Certification process
?Cont. ed. credit
?Extension credit
?Residence credit
Univ. schedule classes
Registration
Course sequence (21 hrs.--7 courses)
Begin & end dates (6 X 7.5 hrs/course)
State agency recruit students
flyers to all schools
talk to indiv. teachers
determine if adequate number of students will attend
Invidual instructor
Develop syllabi (same as used on campus, individual projects applied to region)
Compile: written materials (send ahead for duplication)
video materials
reference materials
Order texts through Cont. Ed.
Set up travel: air, hotel, car
Register students
Teach the classes
Advisement
Duplicate materials
Acquire & set up equipment
Identify local housing
Notify students of class dates
Individual students:
Commit to attend class
Apply to univ. as:
a)degree student
b) non-degree student
c) cont. ed. student
Register for classes
Pay fees & buy books
Attend class & complete assignments

Figure 5 The numbers of students trained in both programs.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN EACH PROGRAM

YEAR	TEXAS TECH OUTREACH VH	TEXAS TECH OUTREACH O&M	TEXAS TECH ON-CAMPUS VH	TEXAS TECH ON-CAMPUS O&M	UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA-BIRMINGHAM
1979-80	Region XIX 14	--------	4	--------	5
1980-81	Region VIII 16	--------	11	--------	7
1981-82	Region I 16 Region IX 4	--------	8	--------	16
1982-83	Region XIV 9	--------	11	--------	9
1983-84	Region XVI 14	--------	10	--------	7
1984-85	Region VI 10	Region I 11 Region VIII 4	11	4	10
1985-86	Region XVIII 10 Region XIV 8	Region I 8 Region VIII 4	9	8	11
1986-87	Region III 22	Region I 6	6	6	12
1987-88	Region XX 23	Region XVI 4	6	6	7
1988-89	Region X 31	Region XIX 7	6	5	11
1989-90	Region XVI 11	Region XX 9	23	6	9
1990-91	Region IV 15	Region III 6	9	4	5

Author note:

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